

## **Cuba to begin full internet access for mobile phones**

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**In this July 1, 2015 file photo, youths use a password protected wifi network coming from a five star hotel to surf the Internet on their smart phones in downtown Havana, Cuba. (AP Photo/Desmond Boylan, File)**

**Havana:** Cuba announced Tuesday night that its citizens will be offered full internet access for mobile phones beginning this week, becoming one of the last nations to offer such service.

Mayra Arevich, president of the Cuban state telecom monopoly ETECSA, went on national television to say Cubans can begin contracting 3G service for the first time Thursday.

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The Cuban government has been building a 3G network in cities across the island and some tourists, Cuban government officials and foreign businesspeople have had access to it for several years.

The communist-governed island has one of the world's lowest rates of internet use but that has been expanding rapidly since Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro declared detente in 2014. Expansion has not slowed with President Donald Trump's partial rollback of relations.

Cuba authorized home internet in 2017 and hundreds of public Wi-Fi connection points have opened in parks and plazas around the country.

The new service will cost about 10 cents per megabyte, with packages ranging from 600 megabytes for about \$7 to four gigabytes for about \$30.

Those prices are roughly in line with global standards but still out of reach for many Cubans who subsist on state salaries of about \$30 a month.

Cuba ran a fiber-optic connection to Venezuela in 2012, allowing the island to shift from slow and costly satellite links. It then began the slow process of allowing citizens to get online.

The government opened state-run internet cafes in 2013, joined by Wi-Fi sites two years later. The number of sites has grown to more than 800.

The Cuban internet is mostly uncensored but the government blocks a small number of sites like the US-funded Radio and Television Marti networks and others that advocate for systematic change on the island.

ETECSA vice president Tania Velazquez said the new service would come online in stages from Thursday through Saturday to avoid the congestion that struck the mobile network during a series of heavily criticized tests this year.

- AP